

A Chopin Manuscript: Prelude in A-flat Major, op. posth.

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Chopin's Prelude in A-flat Major, without opus number, was first published in Geneva in the August 1918 issue of the art journal *Pages d'Art*. Untitled by Chopin, the forty-one-measure piece appeared under the title *Prélude inédit*. The work was first performed in public on April 9, 1919, by E. R. Blanchet and was subsequently reissued in an edition by the music publisher Henn. French and English editions were planned but were never carried out. Today the piece is regarded as a posthumous prelude and is frequently published appended to the Preludes, op. 28 along with the Prelude in C-sharp Minor, op. 45.

Compared to the rest of Chopin's oeuvre the piece is a trifle, having caused some to question its authenticity.¹ Chopin, however, never actually submitted the work for publication, intending it instead as a gift for a friend. There is no reason to doubt its authorship, though Chopin himself did not consider it a work suited for inclusion among his published work.

The Prelude carries the dateline "Paris 10 [18?] Juillet 1834," but the actual day of the month is unclear and has been interpreted as both the 10th² and the 18th³. The dedication, "A mon ami P. Wolff," is to Pierre Wolff, a professor of piano at the Geneva Conservatory. Chopin and Wolff met through their mutual friendship with Anton Wodzinski who was living in Geneva at the time. The manuscript was apparently presented to Wolff as a gift and was passed on to his student Aline Forget. It was discovered among family papers by Pierre Forget and remained in the family's possession until 1962 when Edouard Forget sold it to the Spokane Conservatory, where it became part of the Moldenhauer Archives.

The manuscript consists of two leaves, 15.5 cm. by 24 cm. in size. There are eight staves per page, each approximately 19.5 cm. long. A partial unidentified watermark appears on the bottom right-hand corner of the second page.



A copy of a letter from the Chopin scholar Arthur Hedley accompanies the manuscript and attests to its authenticity. Due to Chopin's practice of using copyists, as well as to his tendency to submit differing copies of the same work to his French, German, and English publishers, the process of determining a manuscript to be in Chopin's hand is no easy task. In particular, the copies made by Julian Fontana are notoriously similar to

Chopin's own hand and have been erroneously identified as originals in the past.⁴ As an authentic Chopin manuscript, the Prelude in A-flat Major provides a noteworthy standard of comparison by which to judge other such documents and, we hope, will help in the process of distinguishing original Chopin manuscripts from those of his copyists.

¹ Edouard Ganche, *Dans le Souvenir de Frédéric Chopin* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1925), pp. 96-97.

² Maurice J. E. Brown, *Chopin: An Index...* (London: Macmillan, 1960), p. 84.

³ Józef Michał Chomiński and Teresa Dalila Turlo, *Katalog Dzieł Fryderyka Chopina* (Kraków, Poland: Polskie Wydawnictwo Muzyczne, 1990), p. 187.

⁴ See Emanuel Winternitz, *Musical Autographs, from Monteverdi to Hindemith* (Princeton University Press, 1955), vol. II, plates 110-11, where two alleged Chopin manuscripts, the Allegro de Concert, op. 46 and the Polonaise in A-flat Major, are reproduced on facing pages. In his letter of authentication, October 13, 1960, Hedley notes the Allegro, op. 46 was later discovered to be a Fontana copy.